



Delta County Search & Rescue

111 North 3rd Street
Escanaba, Michigan 49829 (906)786-3634

Talking Points to Support HB 4642

1. The use of warning lights by emergency search & rescue (SAR) personnel may be the difference between life and death for a victim. In many situations every second counts and with a limited ability to respond quickly, the expertise and equipment possessed by SAR personnel may be useless.
2. The use of warning lights while responding to a call for help doesn't change the responsibility of the responding SAR team member when it comes driving. The lights are intended to give proper warning to other vehicles on the road and let them know that this vehicle needs to get through. It does not give the individual the right to drive with excessive speed. This will be strictly enforced by our Sheriff.
3. Before any of our members will be able to use lights on their personal vehicles, they will have to go through proper training that will be put on by our sheriff. This training will be based on the training recommended by the Michigan Township Association Participating Plan. In addition, our department will have its own set of rules and guidelines that all members must follow. These guidelines will stipulate when we should run lights and when it's best if we keep them off. Not all calls will require an immediate response, but the use of lights will certainly help with the ones that do.
4. Our SAR team is highly trained and equipped to handle many emergency situations. One of the more common situations that we see here in Delta County is when an ice fisherman or snowmobiler falls through the ice. Each of the Delta County SAR team members carry emergency ice rescue suits in their vehicles at all times during the winter months. Our members are also certified in ice rescue techniques. The suits that we carry can keep a person's core body temperature at 98.6 degrees for up to 12 hours in freezing water. Without this protection hypothermia can set in very quickly. When someone goes through the ice, more often than not a police officer will be the first person on scene because they are called first and can get through traffic the quickest. A vast majority of police cruisers (even in the U.P.) do not carry ice rescue equipment on a daily basis, and without one of these suits their ability to help is very limited. Our SAR members do carry this equipment and we're trained to use it. In an ice rescue situation, we need to get on scene as quickly as possible to give us the best chance of saving a life.

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Several years ago, off the Stonington Peninsula here in Delta County, 4 individuals were in a little boat when it capsized in rough weather. When the 911 call came in, all the emergency response personnel from around the area immediately headed for the scene which was about 20 miles from the city of Escanaba. Among those who were responding was Delta County Under Sheriff, Ed Oswald.

When Ed got the call, he was in Brampton Township which is about 10 miles from the scene. Knowing that he didn't have an ice rescue suit or any ice rescue equipment in his vehicle, he immediately started thinking of what he was going to do once he got on scene. It was the last day of the firearms deer season (end of November), so even though the lake wasn't frozen, the water was extremely cold. In fact, there was about 6 inches of fresh snow on the ground. As he was responding, Ed remembered that one of our SAR team members lived in the area, so he got him on the phone and informed him of the situation. The SAR member grabbed his ice rescue equipment and went out to the road to get picked up by Ed.

Tragically 3 of the 4 victims passed away. The one victim that did survive is here today because of Under Sheriff Oswald, the SAR member and the ice rescue equipment that they had at the scene. Of course we'll never know if we could have saved any of the others had SAR gotten the call and been able to respond quicker, but we do know this...in this type of situation, every second counts.

The members of Delta County SAR are very dedicated to our mission. We go through rigorous training and rely on an array of very specialized equipment. Our inability to use warning lights on our vehicles when responding to a call for help has lessened our effectiveness in the past, and it's a problem that we must get fixed.